

PILLARS OF SALT OR TONGUES OF FIRE

DR. ROBERT MOORE

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PILLARS OF SALT OR TONGUES OF FIRE?

In the old testament story of the destruction of Sodom the good man Lot is taking his wife away from this dying culture - a culture that got so stuck in itself that it became completely turned in upon itself and in the end consumed itself. But she is hankering after the culture that she understood so well and had lived in all her life and she disobeyed the command from God who said that those who survived are those who do not look back at the doomed city. She turned to look back and as the Bible tells us was frozen into a pillar of salt.

To be turned into a pillar of salt means to be frozen into uselessness. And to be frozen into uselessness means to try to abolish the future in the name of the past.

On the other hand, the new testament tells us when the apostles met together on the day of pentecost, tongues of flame descended upon

them and they seemed like new men ~~and they seemed like new men~~ and they seemed to be able to communicate with all kinds of strangers - in the strangers' own languages. The tongues of flame of course represent three things. First, human imagination by which we make ourselves infinitely larger than we normally are. Second, a sensitivity to those who don't speak our language, whether that language is a tongue or whether it is a way of thinking. And thirdly, a dynamism which makes people take on tremendous odds on the assumption that they can lick those odds.

I want to move away from the Bible now and go to a description of Canada which a while ago I wrote out one day on a train. At the time that I wrote it I was a ^{guest} ~~visitor~~ to this country, in fact, I was a foreign diplomat. As this country began to intrigue me the words came to me and I want to give them to you now. Here they are:

Canada is a country, bounded on the north by mystery, on the south by importunity, on the east by history and on the west by the east.

VIP

I know it's a strange description but I am using it symbolically. On

Cosmos the north by mystery - of course that refers to our areas in the arctic, but much larger it refers to our sense of the cosmos, that mysterious and obviously an infinite entity of which we are a part and of which we are perhaps the most conscious expression.

On the south by importunity - that is the United States but it really stands as a symbol or the pressure to become like somebody else. To be Canadian in location, but American by thought, behaviour and expenditure.

HOMOGENIZING Forces

On the east by history - history stands there for a sense of heritage. That is the ability to look back and to draw wisdom from the experience of the past without being Lot's wife backward looking, that is to say being 'stuck in the past'.

CULTURE + STORY

Pacific

And on the west by the east - the east stands there for the specific rim - as we like to call it, the tigers of Asia, the burgeoning new economies that are overtaking our own, but also it stands for ancient,

Pervasive

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~~immense~~, complicated cultures, if we are going to do business with them, and if they are going to be as they are already are, our neighbours, we will have to set out to understand.

Put it another way. Our young people if they are going to live intelligently and with confidence in the world of the 21st century will have to have a sense of wonder to keep their curiosity alive and therefore, the ability to delve into things active. Secondly, a sense of their roots and the values that those roots are so that they don't suffer from a takeover by other people of themselves. Thirdly, a sense of the past so that they can call upon its experience in dealing with the present. And finally, a sense of how the world is changing and therefore, how to respond and work with those changes.

A tall order, yes. But times of historical change have always posed tall orders to the people who live in them.

CHINESE
Curse! May you live in interest-
ing times

We are all facing the challenges such as human kind has never faced before - and for a number of good reasons. First of all, the

challenges are global, but the first time in a long evolution of the human species we have to see ourselves not simply as citizens of a particular nation, but belonging to a neighbourhood which is the world. With ^{DO NOT} neighbours that we always understand, neighbours who seem sometimes to be bent on making neighbourliness difficult, but nonetheless, a neighbourhood where if we do not learn the ways of being together, then we shall assuredly perish together.

Secondly, never before in the evolution of our planet has it been under threat from the human species. I don't have to tell you, you know it already, that both the rich and the poor, the rich are to greed and the poor are to need are assaulting the physical, the natural environment and may bring it to the point where it reacts by getting rid of its assaulters.

Thirdly, the information revolution which is throwing at us such immense amounts of detail that we can be left floundering in a morass of fractured knowledge. Finally, the danger that we may all become so culturally chauvinistic, so concerned that we exclude every other culture

from the nations we belong to that we may end up with endless wars of culture run by micro chips sovereignty.

*Ethnic cleaning
Very Nazi*

These are formidable challenges of the kind that mankind 100 years ago would never have been able to imagine. Do you know what it means for us? It means that we have to re-invent the human. We have to take a new look at our capabilities as human beings, a new look at the way we handle the technology we have created, a new look at what it means to be a citizen of a globe. And, most important of all, a new look at the ethical systems and the value systems by which we live. It's at the point of re-inventing the human that the teacher/librarian is so central to the whole business of education. For if education is going to be worthwhile at all, in the next twenty years, it's aim has to be not just to give young people information, not just to give them contexts for that information, not just to make them technological wizards, but to help them to re-invent themselves to cope with dimensions and demands of living that none of us have ever had to do before. The teacher/librarian - my conception - and remember I am a lay person in this - you are the experts, but let me give you my little bit of ^{heresy} ~~hierarchy~~ on the

teacher/librarian. I picture a teacher/librarian as someone who in the course of dealing with students begins to recognize the capabilities and the temperamental ~~and~~ strength (and limitation) of the various students, he or she deals with. Therefore, it's not just a question of helping kids to manage information that is beamed to them through computers, helping them to use the computer effectively, it is being sensitive enough to the kids who live more by the imagination than by analysis, to those who live more by analysis than by the imagination, to those who take a linear view of learning and pursue one thing wholeheartedly, and to those who have the kind of minds that pull things together and want to see interconnection. ^P The teacher/librarian in my view is going to help these students to help create balances between their own capabilities and the capabilities of other students. That's why, in a sense, the teacher/librarian is as symbol of education gone cooperative rather though much than education gone individually competitive. For to avoid the fragmentation of the knowledge that is being thrown at the young people, it is important that the teacher/librarian help the students to correct their weaknesses by the strength of their fellows, and use their strength to correct their fellows weaknesses.

Those who see webs
 Those who see parallel lines

If we are going to re-invent the human, one of the things that means is that we are going to have to approach problem solving in rather different ways than we did before. We have to approach problem solving for instance with a great deal more information than even the previous generation have. We are going to have to approach problem solving with a deeper understanding of the processes of the cosmos than was ever dreamed of by our fathers and mothers. We are going to approach problem solving from a position of spiritual strength as opposed to a position of *dominating* consuming greed.

Cooperative approaches to problem solving means contributing insights, strengths, details in the sense of context. It also means that each person becomes or is intended to become an expert on a particular aspect. It means constant dialogue with one's fellows; it means enriching our fellows with our own information as they enrich us. Cooperative problem solving means being aware that there is a problem. Asking the teacher/librarian to start one on the information that could give us a focus on the problem. Having the teacher/librarian help the kids to see angles to the problem or contradictory information which has

9A

Cuba - The crisis of the
Cuban Boat
People.

Meaning - The American
Attitude to
~~People~~
a small defiant
State

Connection - The right to
say how people
shall be governed
in this hemis-
phere

American messianic impulse
Tom Paine: "We have
the chance to begin
humanity all over again

Dentistry linked
to The founding
Document of
the American
Revolution

Happiness - a Right
Smile to express
happiness

Teeth make Support
Smile

= Dentistry

Developing the Critical Stance 9

to be knitted together into the new focus and then speculation playing with various ideas that might lead the kids to finding a way of handling the problem and as they do so, bringing in the imagination which sets in our ears which not in existence but which act as a kind of guide to the way the information can be used to solve the problem.

Establishing meaning & See over

All of that amounts to managing information, rather than being overwhelmed by it, but it amounts to much more. It means using the right side of the brain and the left side of the brain in problem solving. It means combining what we call analysis which is creating focuses for something with imagination and intuition which means leaping ahead of the analysis, to envisage the solution or a number of solutions and then working back from them to see how they will fit the material we will have. And you know what all of that also means? It means refusing to accept what we call subject disciplines as finalities. Helping children to see how a number of subjects can contribute to the solution of a real life problem. How physics and chemistry, as well as history in economics can be brought together to deal with let us say an environmental issue, an issue for instance of the disposal of waste, the issue of the pollution of the

Patricia + Wjara Women

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motor car, the issue of population pressure, on scarce resources, like land and the productive use of land. And let me add here, a considerable plus sign that Canada has been acquiring over the last 100 years. In almost every classroom of Canada now, even here in Newfoundland, there have been students who have been born here or brought here at an early age, but whose parents belong to different cultural traditions. To be able to call upon those students to bring certain strength of their cultural traditions to the mix of information and context and speculation is a profound advantage because as we are learning increasingly our own culture has immense richnesses but also big blind spots. So have all cultures. One of the things we have been slowly coming to realize is that as we come nearer to our neighbour's different cultures it is not only that we need tolerance to understand them but far more important, we need the wisdom of what their culture can offer us in terms of human enablement and human betterment our culture has left out.

One of the most important things a teacher/librarian can do and I am sure many teachers/librarians are already doing it, is to help children

along with the classroom teacher to develop the art of visioning. That is to say, to use the imagination to conjure up a picture of the future that they prefer to see and then examine in their discussions how feasible their vision is in relation to what they know by the means at present available to implement it.

That sounds a complicated thing to do. Let me give you an example. During a day like today when it's windy, wet and cold, you imagine that you are in the delectable island of Jamaica in the Caribbean. That is a dream. You day dream. Then suddenly you begin to attach to your day dream an importance which means you feel you can do something to bring it into existence. You see yourself not only being in Jamaica in dream, but in fact, so you begin to plan. You get out guidebooks, you get information about Jamaica, you go to the travel agency. You ask for the expenses. You ask about the package tours. You sit, you study them. You work out the details. You do all of that because your dream holds you, because your dream draws you. You compare the expenses of the travel tours with your own finances. You decide that you can do it or you decide that you can borrow the money but you have certain ways of paying it back. All of that is planning the implementation of the dream. Then you go to the travel agent. You pay down your money. You get your ticket and you are mentally set to go. When the time comes you depart. You go for your holiday in Jamaica. Your holiday is not quite like the dream but in fact it has some of the

possibilities that the dream did not yield. It has some of the limitations that the dream did not encourage you to see. Nonetheless, the fact that you are in Jamaica means that because you envisaged it and you move from envisioning it to looking at its feasibility to looking at ways of making it feasible, you have in fact implemented a vision even though it is something as ordinary as taking a holiday in the Caribbean.

When this example
ceases to be adequate
is^{1st} the lack of funda-
mental values

Vision is Values
expressed by Symbols
that becomes a way of
judging the present
society and an impulsion
to work back from

I emphasize envisioning because humankind needs more than it ever did before. To envision scenarios in which certain values prevail that will ensure the survival of our species and the survival of our planet of which our species has evolved.

Another interesting example - it is now commonplace that a great deal of the science fiction that was written since the 16th century since the renaissance has become science fact. Men envisage going to the moon. Men envisage discovering other civilizations among the stars. We have done it! And we have done it because we have the industrial and technological revolutions which began as attempts to understand the mysteries of the universe and unfortunately ended up in an attempt to try to human dominate the universe instead of human cooperate with the universe.

But always we were driven by a dream to expand our habitat, to delve more deeply to what make the cosmos so luminous, so immense, and so mysterious. Because we envision the possibility of doing things

we have in fact created the means whereby we can do them. Perhaps the greatest need we have at the moment is the security of the planet and our home - the security of the human species everywhere. The equilibrium of our economic systems so some do not have more food than then can consume and others have less than they need. And most important of all, the equilibrium of an national order which prevents Somalia's and Rawanda's, Bosnia's, Herzegovina's which prevents immense massacres, immense famines, and the build up of arms on borders and international anarchy.

In short, whatever we now envision is only going to work if our vision is created out of a combination of values and ethics, political will and technology. This brings me back to the teacher/librarian exists not just to help students access information, but to help those students see information from a global ethical standpoint.

You can put in the words I respect deeply. Human security means a child that does not die and ethnic conflict that does not break out - a woman that is not robbed or mauled on the streets by a predator, or

a dissident that is not suppressed

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river that is not polluted and an ozone layer that is not continuously punctured.

The ethical dimension brings me back to our values and our spiritual roots. It brings me back to the idea of helping our students to realize that there is no such thing as matter without spirit or spirit without matter. It brings me back to the increasing awareness by our physical scientists that the electrons, the neutrons seem to disappear into an unknown entity and reappear again. The energetic particles of the universe are constantly crossing boundaries of being and what appears to be non-being. In fact, physicists tell us that to treat the world as matter is the most fundamental mistake we have ever made. It has to be seen as matter intertwined with spirit, spirit intertwined with matter. What is more, they are telling us that individualism is something that does not stand long in the universe. That the various energy particles move in communities, communicate with each other in ways we still do not understand and they are constantly interacting with each other which in a sense comes back to what we were saying earlier that where the teacher/librarian encourages the cooperative view of learning there she's

encouraging her students to experience the spiritual, physical matter of which this cosmos is made.

There is something occurring that is extremely healthy. Look at the opening and closing ceremonies of international games and you will see what I mean.

Take Lilihammer, for example, the Olympics in Norway. It began with the folklore, the mythology of Norway, with the little creatures who Norwegians swear they see and probably do because they believe in them. Creatures of the forest, creatures that come out of the deep psychological researches of the Norwegian mind, centuries ago, who protect the forest - the spirits of benignity who will punish the evil doers who destroy the forest - it will call children to appreciate the magnitude and beauty of the trees and the water and the sky and our guardians of the ecological balance.

The moral, the physical prowess in the Olympics is unsustainable without a psychic fitness. The journey without - that is the 1/4 mile,

pole-vaulting is impossible without a deep journey within and this is a text that is written right across any attempts we make to give to our world of security that will make it viable to the next century.

We have to journey within as well as journey without. Whether a teacher/librarian is talking to a student who may be very economically oriented - what she brings to that student's awareness is in the pursuit of solving a problem. Walt Whitman had something to say about the nature of the problem and W.H.  Ordine wrote about an angle of the problem in which the student has not looked. There is an Inuit story that deals with the same problem from an angle that the student might never have thought possible, then that librarian is encouraging (but might not always work) the students - to see the problem as within as well as without, as starting from the very psychic picture of the human and expressing itself in the physical and texture of society. Or perhaps the teacher/librarian could point the student to an essay which takes the situation as it is being studied and turns it upside down.

Let me give you a final story. In England some years ago, a group

of twelve year olds was asked to write an essay on the car. Most of the students talked about what a wonderful thing the car was, how many cars their parents had, what makes of cars they were, and how cars had added a joy to the world of racing. One girl looked at the car upside down. She said that a visitor coming from Mars had landed in North America and quickly came to the conclusion that there were two kinds of beings - one called a car and the other called a human. And in their relationship, the car was the master, and the human was the slave. The human created bedrooms for the cars where they pampered, where they cleaned, where they added things to them. The humans took the cars out on five days of what they call a week, drove them long distances to clubs, where the cars could enjoy the company of their fellows while the humans worked in things called offices or factories to make enough money to support the car. At the end of every period of hours that they called a working day, the humans took the cars away from their club, put them back into their bedrooms and closed them up for the night to have a rest.

On Sundays, the humans took the cars out to feel the duty of the countryside or to get a long rolling exercise and then they brought them back to start the whole process over again of being good slaves to support their cars in the next five of what they humans call days.

A lovely essay, there was a child with that wonderful quality of the imagination. Why it could see relationships normal, wise and good in a totally different context from a different perspective and in a different light.

That's precisely the kind of help the teacher/librarian can give. It's precisely the kind of help that our students need if they are going to start thinking of our world in totally different terms, seeing it in absolutely different context, and looking at themselves in a new light and realizing that they have to got to find solutions to make this a workable, global civilization. Consequently, they have to start drawing on their deep internal psychic powers which is another way of saying that they have to re-invent themselves by tapping on forces that we have left alone.